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ABSTRACT

In general, children between the ages of four and eight criticize works of art based on their subject matter, color, pattern, or related combinations of these criteria. Between the ages of 8 and 11 children begin to notice their feelings, the artist's ability, and the expressive qualities of a picture. After the age of 11 children become increasingly interested in the evocative qualities of a work. This paper compares how children and adolescents of different grade levels respond differently to works of art, focusing on the following areas: (1) describing works of art; (2) the manner in which they state their preferences; (3) what kind of criteria they use for judging works of art; and (4) the differences between the preferences and judgments they made in responding to works of art. The paper reports that 517 students in grades 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and a university were randomly selected from three public schools in Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China, three schools in Kinman, and one university in Taipei. Each subject was asked to respond to three types of paintings by answering three structured interview questions. The paper presents and discusses findings from the study. Findings suggest that when the individual's aesthetic ability has developed to the highest point, then the individual may no longer separate preference concept from value judgment concept. Contains a figure and 22 references. (BT)

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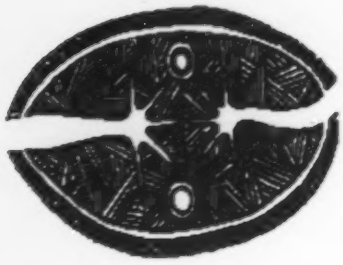

"Children's and Adolescents' Conceptions in Describing Works of Art"

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CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' CONCEPTIONS IN DESCRIBING WORKS OF ART

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The Earlier Research in This Field

There are two main types of research in this field: studies which examined some specific elements of a developmental structure, and those which looked for a holistic stage structure of aesthetic development. These studies provide developmental understandings about children's aesthetic abilities.

The studies that examined specific elements

One category of studies examines some specific elements of children's conception of art. They focus on investigating the tendencies that govern children's perception of art objects, and/or the factors that determine children's judgment (Child, 1964; Gardner, 1970; Hardiman and Zernich, 1977, 1985; Lark-Horovitz, 1937, 1938; Moore, 1973; Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman, & Gardner, 1978; etc), or some aesthetic concepts of understanding (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Ecker, 1973; Gardner, Winner, & Kircher, 1975; Johnson, 1982; Russell, 1988;etc).

The studies that looked for a holistic structure of developmental stages

A second category of studies looked for a holistic structure of developmental stages of children's aesthetic abilities. These studies tended to possess a widespread and descriptive grasp (Brunner, 1975; Clayton, 1974; Coffey, 1968; Housen, 1983; Parsons, 1976, 1987;etc).

Summary

In general, children between the ages of four and eight criticize works of art based on their subject matter, color, pattern, or related combinations of these criteria. Their egocentric personalities influence their responses. Between the ages of eight and eleven, children begin to notice their feelings, the artist's ability, and the expressive qualities of a picture. When evaluating a work, they are concerned with the realistic depiction of a scene. After the age of eleven, viewers become increasingly interested in the evocative qualities of a work. They are concerned with the work's image and feelings. Subsequently, the youngsters' conceptions for criticizing a work derive from the interrelationship between subject matter and the formal elements within the work.

Research problem

Aesthetic deduction and its gradual growth form important subjects of aesthetic development, as well as establish the foundation of the aesthetic phase theory. Aesthetic deduction is related to the individual's evaluation of specific problems or objects. Hence, the theory (Broudy, 1972; Feldman, 1971; Osborne, 1971; Smith, 1989) provides that the concept development of a certain observer from description, expression of personal preference and judgment of a certain artwork would contain different focal points of its evolution. But, how do these aesthetic thoughts change or develop at different age levels or professional standards, or to some extent, with different art genre? This research problem veers more towards the first type of research mentioned in the bibliography. Its exploration of certain aesthetic concepts was not established on the phase development theory. Bibliographies revealed that certain researchers conducted specific studies, and this aspect deserves further understanding.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to compare how children and adolescents of different grade levels respond differently to works of art, focusing on the following areas: 1) describing works of art, 2) the manners in

which they state their preferences, 3) what kind of criteria they use for judging works of art, 4) the differences between the preferences and judgments they made in responding to works of art.

Methods

Five hundred and seventeen students, in grade first, third, fifth, seventh, ninth, eleventh grades, and university students (including art majors and non-art majors), were randomly selected from three public schools in Taipei, three schools in Kinman, and one university in Taipei, Taiwan, R.O.C. Approximately half of the students were girls and half were boys in each group. Each subject was requested to respond to three types of paintings by answering three structured interview questions. The questions were: 1) What do you see from this painting? (Describe as clearly as possible); 2) Do you like it or not? Why? (please state reason for liking or disliking painting) From the reasons you presented, pick out the one you found most important; 3)Do you think the painting is good or not? Why? (Well or not, please state reason)Please pick out one that you find most important from the aforementioned reasons. Three Western art genres –realism, expressionism and the abstract were used as visual stimulus. Artworks were reproduced in slides, and then questionnaire were conducted through slide viewing. Pearson's X^2 Analysis was used to test the hypothesis that students' preferences and judgments do not depend on grade levels. G^2 Analysis was used to test the independency among grade, preference, and judgment. Kappa Analysis was used to understand the agreement among five judges.

Findings and Discussions

Conclusion of Objectives

Objectives 1:

Majority of the students tended to describe realistic and expressive art through subject and describe abstract art through visual elements. In the description by subject aspect, it was learned that all the student respondents gave the highest ratio to realistic art. Second is expressive art and last is abstract art. In the visual element aspect, it was learned that all the student respondents gave the highest ratio to abstract art. In the format arrangement aspect, 9th grade students talked more about abstract art, while In terms of grasp of artwork expressiveness, it was found that among the different year level students, whatever the art genre may be, grasp improves as year level is higher. It is only in the abstract art genre that art major students have a better grasp than non-art major students.

In the study focusing on realistic art genre, only the grade 1 students showed better opinions in terms of expression of art. All the respondents did not have any problem with understanding in face of realistic art. Generally, among the three art genres, students have a problem recognizing and understanding abstract art. When university or lower level students were asked to describe a painting, abstract and expressive paintings tend to elicit more reactions than realistic art.

Objective 2:

The painting preference choices of students from different year levels are not totally the same, choices vary with art genre. Majority of the students prefers the realistic painting most, followed by the expressive painting. A significant difference was noted among the preference choices of realistic and expressive art of different year level students. A majority of the students manifested a dislike for the abstract painting. No significant difference was noted in the preference choice for abstract art. As for the preference concepts, a significant difference was noted among the different year levels. A significant difference was noted in the different year-level students' preference concepts, however the difference is not dictated by the art genre. In other words, regardless of the art genre used, the preference (yes or no) concept of students from different year levels differs significantly.

When students state their preferences about realistic and expressive works, first and third graders focus on the subject matter, and fifth, seventh, and ninth graders count on expression. When students state their preferences about abstract work, first and third graders think beauty/reality is important, fifth and seventh graders consider cognition, ninth graders emphasize on expression and beauty/reality. The students after ninth grade depend on the expressiveness of a picture no matter the types of art work.

Objective 3:

The judgments of students' choices from different year levels are not totally the same, and judgments vary with the art genre. No significant differences were noted from the realistic and expressive art judgment, good or bad, of the different year level students; however significant differences were noted in their abstract art judgment. Majority of the students thought realistic and expressive art are good works of art, moreover, more students thought abstract art is not a good thing. As for their judgment concepts, significant differences were noted from the different year levels, differences did not vary with genre. cognition in an abstract work. Expressiveness is important to the students after ninth grade level no

matter the types of works. No significant differences were noted in the concepts of the art and non-art major students for all three genres. In other words, despite the differences existing between these genres, the reasons behind the "good" and "bad" judgment result of the students, art and non-art major alike, are quite similar for each genre.

Objective 4:
The painting preference and value judgment choices of students from different grade levels, as well as their preference and value judgment primary concepts are significantly different, choices were not affected by art genre. However not every grade level manifested a significant difference in their painting preference and value judgment choices and primary concepts. The difference noted in the 7th garde senior high students preference and value judgment choices occurred at the abstract art genre; however in terms of realistic and abstract art, difference was noted in the preference and value judgment primary concepts. Moreover, differences were noted in the grade 5 students' realistic art preference and value judgment primary concepts. Concepts varied with art genre.

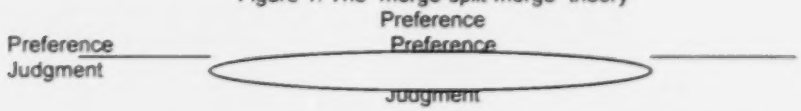
The preference and value judgment choices of art and non-art major students, for each painting, are not totally different. Non-art major students showed significant differences in their choices regarding realist ic art, but for the other art genres, choices were the same. As for art major students, significant differences were noted in the realistic and expressive art, but choices were the same for abstract art. The preference and value judgment primary concepts expressed show a significant difference among non-art major students; however no such difference were noted among art major students.

Implications for future studies

1.This paper supplements Osborn's (1971) aesthetic theories:
Osborn propounded that "individual preference and judgment vary"; however, he failed to state how they differed. His study did not delve into the effects of and interaction between age brackets, course major, and art genre. Hence, in supplement to Osborn's theory, this paper propounds that: students from grade 1 to college (art and non-art major) possess different preference and judgment choices, however, choices are affected by art genre. In the art major students, no difference was noted in the concept between preference and judgment; moreover, choices did not differ because of art genre. Differences were still noted among students from grade 1 to university; likewise, choices are affected by art genre.

Furthermore, we can present a hypothesis from this research finding. When the individual's aesthetic ability has developed to the highest point, then one may no longer separate preference concept from value judgment concept. To quote a statement made by an art student during the course of this research, "naturally it is something I think is good, that is why I like it." In other words, when an individual possesses rich aesthetic experiences, imperceptibly, he will use the same valuation skills on his individual preferences and judgment. If we follow this trend of thought and incorporate the first stage of Parsons' (1987) are one and the same [p. 22]), then as the individual's aesthetic ability develops, preference and judgment concepts may develop following the "merge-split-merge" pattern. This theoretical hypothesis still needs further proof and research.

Figure 1: The "merge-split-merge" theory



2.The concepts noted from the reason presentation of an individual possess very stable intrinsic cognitive structural characteristics. Present study reveals that although the paintings belong to different art genre, no significant differences were noted in the concept perspective of the reasons the students presented for their preferences or judgments.

3.The findings of this study support the findings of the exploratory research (Chen, 1998c): The questions used to guide student answers will affect their evaluations. Looking at the answers given by students, it was noted that students of each year level use varying aesthetic concepts to answer description, preference and value judgment questions. Furthermore, findings are also coherent with past findings: students react to artworks according to their partiality for subject and colors. This makes the art form and expression characteristics interesting to them. Grasp of expressionism improves as their year level becomes higher.

4.Appreciation teaching theories (Broudy, 1972; Feldman, 1971) are but theories that teach students how to describe, analyze, understand and make judgments, so they may improve their aesthetic skills. According to a latter-day scholar Perkins (1994), give the observer time to look and think, then implement

the aforementioned organized observation methods. This provides the educator with feasible teaching strategies, however, it is impossible to understand the starting point of the actual thought process of different learners viewing different artworks. From the teaching standpoint, teachers should understand the starting point behavior of the students; this is the type of information we are attempting to present. Hence, our findings can be helpful to the formulation of present-day course curriculum policy evaluation, as well as to the implementation and execution of teaching strategies. The visual arts education of Taiwan has followed the appreciation teaching format for a number of years, however scarcely have evaluations and understanding of the students' aesthetic cognition and learning performance been conducted. This paper hopes to polish a rough diamond and further expand the research and development of visual art education in Taiwan.

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